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ABSTRACT

The Family Literacy Program in Eau Claire, Wisconsin is an example of a strong linkage between professional educators, volunteers, and parents. The program uses the strengths of reading professionals working with preschool students and adult learners in order to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy. Cooperation and hard work are the keys to the success of this program, which grew out of efforts of Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) at Chippewa Valley Technical College. Encouraged by the success of an intergenerational story hour program, LVA Coordinator Carol Gabler, a reading specialist, devised the model upon which the Eau Claire Family Literacy Program is based. The Family Literacy Program provides a preschool program at the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Professionally trained teachers of early childhood education, using the High Scope curriculum, provide children with an environment that encourages choices and decision making, fosters creativity and independent thinking, and allows for development of readiness and language skills. Three days per week, individualized instruction is provided to parents by adult basic education instructors from Chippewa Valley Technical College. Instructors evaluate students and help set educational goals for them. The goals are assessed and redefined as each student progresses through the instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, computer literacy, career planning, test taking, high school equivalency examination preparation, and job-seeking skills. A parenting skills component is an important part of the curriculum, and parents and children work together in reading activities. (KC)

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Reading Professionals: The Vital Link

Carol L. Gabler
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Educators, involved in the field of reading, are the catalysts that can promote change in the field of education. As we look into the '90's, we must discover the needs of our changing families and develop innovative programs for all learners. By linking the strengths of teachers trained in different areas and at different levels, our best resources are tapped.

The Family Literacy Program housed at the local YMCA in Eau Claire, Wisconsin is an example of strong linkage. The program utilizes the strengths of reading professionals working with preschool students and the adult learners. The program is designed to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy. Cooperation and hard work are the keys to the success of this program.

The Family Literacy Program has its roots in a literacy effort which began in the Eau Claire area a number of years ago because of interested educators.

In 1986, Literacy Volunteers of America-Chippewa Valley (LVA-CV) was organized to combat adult illiteracy in a three-county area of west central Wisconsin. LVA-CV, which operates as an outreach center of the Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC), cooperates with other organizations and service providers to offer free, one-on-one literacy instruction to the adults of this region. The LVA Coordinator, a reading specialist, trains volunteer tutors, identifies and screens students, recommends suitable tutoring sites, and provides instructional assistance and materials tailored to the students' individual needs.

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In 1988-89, LVA-CV and CVTC focused their efforts on parents needing literacy services and their preschool children. The needs of this group were addressed through an intergenerational story hour program funded by the Adult Basic Education Special Demonstration Project 310.

LVA-CV's goals for this program were twofold: one, to provide these parents and preschool children a positive learning experience by sharing books in the public library, and two, to enroll parents in a literacy program to improve their basic skills. Area reading specialists, children's librarians, and university student teachers presented special stories. The families also received several books.

Encouraged by the success of the intergenerational story hour program, LVA Coordinator Carol Gabler devised the model upon which the Eau Claire Family Literacy Program is based. The goal of the Family Literacy Program is much the same as that of the story hour: to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy by uniting parents and their preschool children in a positive educational and recreational experience. The program functions under LVA-CV. A special advisory committee has been appointed to evaluate the program and facilitate the integration of resources.

The Family Literacy Program provides a quality prekindergarten preschool program at the local YMCA. Professionally-trained teachers of early childhood education, using the High Scope curriculum, provide children with an environment which encourages choices and decision making, fosters creativity and independent thinking, and allows for development of readiness and language skills. A small portion of the students have English as a second language. The integration of the English as a second language population who have already had conversational English has done very well in this program. Initial materials for the children were purchased by funds

from a United Way venture grant. Future plans for the children's program also include the use of activities directed by education students from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

The YMCA provides swimming lessons and creative movement experiences for the prekindergarten children, as well as babysitting services for younger siblings. In addition, scholarships from the YMCA's "Partnership with Youth" program allow parents and children in the Family Literacy Program to use Y facilities during their free time.

Goal Setting for Parents

Three days a week, individualized instruction is provided to parents in the Family Literacy Program by adult basic education instructors from the Chippewa Valley Technical College. Instructors evaluate each student by the use of an informal reading inventory or the TABE and set educational goals for each individual. These goals are assessed and redefined as each student progresses during the program.

The instruction covers such areas as reading, writing, and math skills; computer literacy; career planning; test taking; high school equivalency exam preparation; and job-seeking skills. Regular opportunities are also provided for students to work one-on-one with LVA-CV tutors.

Parents and Children Working Together

A parenting skills component is an important part of the Family Literacy Program curriculum. Each day, a special time is provided to enhance the relationship of the parent and child through planned, structured interaction. Areas covered include child guidance techniques, child development, and stress management. LVA tutors and students also explore books which parents and children can enjoy together.

EDUCATORS: THE VITAL LINK

The Family Literacy Program works because of the cooperation and hard work of many individuals. Once an adult has made the decison to try again, it is time for the educators to link the student with programs that will serve their needs.

The LVA Coordinator receives referrals from many sources: ABE Instructors, social workers, principals, teachers, employers, and interested friends. Once a referral is made, the coordinator and adult student meet and discuss the student's goals. The student is assessed. When a program to meet the individual's needs is developed, the student is matched with an LVA tutor.

The parent and child are then introduced to the educators involved in the Family Literacy Program.

If additional evaluation of the adult or child is needed, different professionals help make that connection. For example, LVA has utilized the services of the Human Development Center at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for more in-depth evaluations. Speech and language clinicians at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire have also helped students define their needs and reach their goals.

If an adult is employed, every attempt is made by the educators to work with the employer to help the employee upgrade their skills in the most useful way to enhance their job. Students have also benefited from career counseling provided by CVTC.

The LVA and Family Literacy Coordinators have worked closely with educators in the local school system, CVTC, and Human Services social workers to explore possible stable funding sources for intergenerational programs. Coordinated efforts with the business community are also being explored. Hopefully, the success of existing programs will enhance funding in the years ahead.

As educators interested in the field of reading, we have an obligation to take a global view of the challenge facing all learners. By cooperating and sharing our expertise, educators can be the vital link which insures that learners will acquire programs which will meet their needs now and in the future.

Carol Gabler is currently employed by Chippewa Valley Technical College as Literacy Volunteers of America Coordinator. She is also an instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in the Department of Elementary Education. She teaches courses involving teacher education and supervises student teachers.

February 12, 1990

Family Literacy Program

Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Working together to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy

Breaking the Cycle of Illiteracy

The Family Literacy Program has its roots in a literacy effort which began in the Eau Claire area a number of years ago.

In 1986, the Literacy Volunteers of America–Chippewa Valley (LVA-CV) was organized to combat adult illiteracy in a three-county area of west central Wisconsin. LVA-CV, which operates as an outreach center of the Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC), cooperates with other organizations and service providers to offer free one-on-one literacy instruction to the adults of this region. The LVA-CV coordinator trains volunteer tutors, identifies and screens students, recommends suitable tutoring sites, and provides instructional assistance and materials tailored to the students' individual needs.

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LVA-CV's goals for this program were twofold: one, to provide these parents and preschool children with a positive learning experience by sharing books in the public library, and two, to enroll parents in a literacy program to improve their basic skills.

Encouraged by the success of the intergenerational story hour program, LVA-CV Coordinator Carol Gabler devised the model upon which the Eau Claire Family Literacy Program is based. The goal of the Family Literacy Program is much the same as that of the story hour: to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy by uniting parents and their preschool children in a positive educational and recreational experience.

The Family Literacy Program's prekindergarten preschool program uses the High Scope curriculum and is administered by professionally trained teachers of early childhood education. Here, Family Literacy Program Coordinator Karol Machmeier works with a preschool student.

The Younger Generation

The Family Literacy Program provides a quality prekindergarten preschool program at the Eau Claire YMCA. Professionally trained teachers of early childhood education, using the High Scope curriculum, provide children with an environment which encourages choices and decision making, fosters creativity and independent thinking, and allows for development of readiness and language skills. Future plans for the childrens' program also include the use of activities directed by education students from the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire.

The YMCA provides swimming lessons and creative movement experiences for the prekindergarten children, as well as babysitting services for younger siblings. In addition, scholarships from the YMCA's Partnership with Youth program allow parents and children in the Family Literacy Program to use the Y facilities during their free time.

Goal Setting for Parents

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The instruction covers such areas as reading, writing, and math study skills; computer literacy; career planning; test taking; high school equivalency exam preparation; and job-seeking skills. Regular opportunities are also provided for students to work one on one with LVA-CV tutors.

The woman at right is one of 14 parents participating in the first session of the Eau Claire Family Literacy Program. David Godlewski, adult basic education instructor from the Chippewa Valley Technical College, provides parents with individualized instruction three days a week. Below left, a parent works on improving her computer literacy skills. Below right, LVA-CV coordinator Carol Oahler discusses progress with a parent and her LVA tutor.

Parents and Children Working Together

A parenting skills component is an important part of the Family Program curriculum. Each day, a special time is provided to enhance the relationship of the parent and child through planned, structured interaction. Areas covered include child guidance techniques, child development, and stress management.

At left, a father and son cooperate during a parenting skills activity. Such activities are an integral part of the Family Literacy Program.

For More Information

If you have questions or would like more information on the Eau Claire Family Literacy Program, please contact one of the following individuals:

Karol Machmeier
Family Literacy Program Coordinator
Eau Claire YMCA
700 Graham Avenue
Eau Claire, WI 54701
715-836-8460

Jack O'Connell
Adult Basic Education Coordinator
Chippewa Valley Technical College
620 W. Clairemont
Eau Claire, Wi 54701-1098
715-833-6349

Carol Gabler
Coordinator, Literacy Volunteers of America–Chippewa Valley
L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library
400 Eau Claire Street
Eau Claire, WI 54701
715-834-0222

Family Literacy Program Admissions Policy

Applications to the Family Literacy Program will be accepted based on need. Adults participating must:

- be at least 18 years of age;
- have an interest in improving basic literacy and educational skills; and
- have one or more children of pre-kindergarten age (4–5 years) for participation in the preschool program.

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